

# Michigan Time Traveler

An educational supplement produced by Lansing Newspapers In Education, Inc. and the Michigan Historical Center.

## KIDS' History

### It's Harvest Time!

Come with the Time Traveler to discover the roots of Michigan's agricultural history this month. We'll visit Native Americans, settlers from New England and Europe, and Hispanic seasonal workers.

### The Three Sisters

Michigan's first peoples were its first farmers. Native Americans were the first to grow corn on the cob and pumpkins.

When Europeans arrived in this area, many tribes were growing the "three sisters"—corn, beans and squash. Native Americans planted their seeds in small hills of soil. Corn, the strong, tall "sister" was planted in the middle of each hill. When it was a few inches tall, pole beans—the younger sister—and squash seeds—the youngest sister—were planted around the corn. The bean vines climbed the corn for support. (The corn also used nitrogen that the bean roots left in the soil.)

The squash leaves and vines shaded the soil to keep the sun from drying it out.

At the end of the growing season, these early farmers harvested their crop and preserved it for winter. They dried and ground the corn for flour. They dried and stored the beans. Squash, with its hard shell, would also keep for winter.

### Make a Soup with the Three Sisters

This soup includes corn, dried beans and winter squash. Have fun making and eating it!

#### Ingredients

1/4 cup chopped onion  
1 tablespoon olive or canola oil or nonstick pan spray  
32 oz. pkg. low sodium chicken broth  
24 oz. jar Great Northern mixed beans  
2-4 cups winter squash, cubed  
14.5 oz. can diced tomatoes with liquid  
16 oz. pkg. frozen corn  
Pepper

**Kids** 1. Help shop for all the ingredients. Pick out a nice, medium-size acorn, butternut, buttercup, Hubbard or other winter squash.

**Adult** 2. Prepare the squash. Cut in half, remove strings and seeds, and peel. To make this easier to do, heat the squash in a microwave about 3 minutes. Cool before handling. Cut into 1" cubes.

**Kids** 3. Find a good, deep pan for the soup kettle.

**Adult** 4. Heat the pan on medium and sauté the chopped onion until soft.

**Kids** 5. Pour the beans into a colander in the sink. Let the bean liquid drain. Rinse the beans under cold, running water. Let water drain away.

**Adult** 6. Add the chicken broth, the beans and the squash cubes to the onions in the soup kettle. Bring to a gentle boil, cover and let cook until the squash is soft but still in cubes, about 20-30 minutes. Remove 1/4 cup of the mixture with a slotted spoon and place in a bowl.

**Kids** 7. Mash the mixture with a fork. The smashed beans and squash will help thicken the soup.

**Adult** 8. Add diced tomatoes and corn to the kettle. Bring mixture to a simmer and stir in the mashed beans and squash. Let gently simmer for 7-10 minutes, until corn is cooked and soup is heated through.

**Kids** 9. Add pepper. Use a pepper grinder if you have one. Your adult can help decide how much!

**Adult** 10. Stir the soup and serve. A slice of whole grain bread and an apple taste good with it!

### Things to Do

- Visit a Farmer's Market or a U-pick farm or orchard. Try a Michigan vegetable or fruit you have never eaten.
- "Ag Every Day" has stuff for students and teachers. Find it at the Web site of the Michigan Department of Agriculture ([www.michigan.gov/mda](http://www.michigan.gov/mda)) in the Statistics and Resources section.

Comments or suggestions? Write to [TimeTraveler@michigan.gov](mailto:TimeTraveler@michigan.gov).

*Celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month, September 15-October 15.*



Lansing Newspapers In Education (NIE) provides Lansing State Journal newspapers and supplemental teaching materials for area classrooms at little or no cost to the schools. The newspaper becomes a "living textbook," providing students with timely and relevant topics for discussion in class and at home.

If you are interested in sponsoring classroom papers or using the newspaper in your classroom, please contact Patricia O'Hearn, NIE Manager at (517) 377-1242.

### Help for the Harvest

From planting to harvest, farming requires a lot of work. Sometimes farms need extra workers during the growing season. During the 1910s and 1920s,

Michigan sugarbeet farmers hired immigrants from eastern Europe to work in their fields. But these newcomers needed winter jobs, too. Many found full-time work in the growing Detroit automobile industry and did not return to the fields.

The sugarbeet growers—and other farmers—began hiring summer workers from Mexico and Texas. Most of these Hispanic workers went back to the south where there was farm work after the Michigan harvest. But some families stayed. The Rodriquez family settled in Lansing. Maria (Rodriquez) Valasquez worked in the sugarbeet fields for six years. She is 16 years old in the photo. Her story is told in the museum:

*In 1938 we came to Michigan (from Texas) in a truck with others. He [her father, Aurelio Rodriquez] started working in the beets in East Lansing. I was eleven. We'd get out [in the fields] about 4 o'clock in the morning. We'd eat breakfast and take our lunch—took it to where we were working. It was a long day. We got out at dark. In October we'd start topping [the beets]. We used to have a big knife—12-inch blade with pick at the end. We'd hold the beets in one hand and cut the leaves [off].*

Sugarbeets are large—up to 5 pounds—white root vegetables that are made into sugar. Seasonal workers planted, thinned, weeded and harvested the crop. Today sugarbeet growers use both seasonal workers and mechanical methods for these tasks. Seasonal workers still come to Michigan to help with crops, fruits and vegetables such as cherries and celery, as well as flowers.



Family photo, Michigan Historical Museum

### An Agriculture Industry

Even before Michigan became a state settlers came from New England and Europe to farm. They raised crops to feed their families and to sell. They took wagonloads of their harvest to nearby markets. Then, during the Civil War, the northern armies needed food for soldiers. Railroads made it easier to ship larger loads of crops to big cities such as Chicago and Detroit. Michigan Agricultural College (now Michigan State University) helped farmers improve their crops and expand their businesses. Agriculture was Michigan's number one industry for many years. Today it is still a leading industry.



This old postcard shows workers harvesting cucumbers for pickles. State Archives



This young worker is helping with the cherry harvest in this historic photograph from the State Archives.

### Top Crops, Favorite Foods

Michigan leads the nation in the production of many fruits and vegetables. These are number one. Find more ranked crops in today's Time Traveler Teacher's Guide. It's on the Web at [www.michiganhistory.org](http://www.michiganhistory.org).

- Beans, dry, black
- Beans, dry, cranberry
- Blueberries
- Cherries, tart
- Cucumbers (for pickles)



Jerritt and Audrey (kneeling) and Sierra and Alex, 4th grade students at Schoolcraft Elementary School in Waterford, see Michigan's crops on the natural resources mural in the Great Depression Gallery.



**Thank you** to the Lansing School District for its generous contribution to the Newspapers in Education Program and its support of today's Michigan Time Traveler Page and classroom lesson plans.